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www.ufaw.org.uk

*Animal Welfare* 2016, 25: 125-134  
ISSN 0962-7286  
doi: 10.7120/09627286.25.1.125

## ***A survey of animal welfare experts and practicing veterinarians to identify and explore key factors thought to influence canine and feline welfare in relation to veterinary care***

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### **Abstract**

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*Veterinary care is important for maintaining companion animal health; however, it also has the potential to impact other aspects of patient welfare. To investigate factors related to veterinary care that are likely to influence canine and feline welfare, animal welfare researchers, veterinarians with an expertise in animal welfare, and Canadian and American companion and mixed animal veterinarians were invited to participate in a three-stage online survey. Participants were asked to do the following: i) identify factors related to the veterinary experience that impact patient welfare; ii) rate the relative impact of each factor; and iii) gauge the feasibility of measuring and improving each factor. Overall, 78 participants identified 85 factors that impact animal welfare in the clinic (eg restraint techniques) and home environment (eg advice regarding behaviour and training). Among factors, seven themes emerged: physical environment of the clinic; routine animal care provided by veterinary team members ('staff'); interactions between the patient, staff, and client; clinic management; medical and surgical procedures; staff attitudes and education; and communication between the veterinarian and client. Mean relative impact scores ranged from 1.0 to 3.8 on a five-point scale (0–4), with 70% of factors receiving a score greater than 3. Most participants (> 80%) agreed that 68% of the identified factors could be feasibly improved in an average veterinary clinic and that 43% of the factors could be feasibly measured during a welfare assessment. These results identify key areas where veterinary care may impact the welfare of canine and feline patients and highlight priority areas where assessment and improvement are possible.*

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**Keywords:** *animal welfare, assessment, cat, companion animal, dog, veterinary practice*